TL 3156
CIDAC
Centro de Documentação

PRIME MINISTER

CANBERRA

Mr Tony P. Hall, MC and
Mr Stewart B. McKinney, MC
House of Representatives
Congress of the United States
WASHINGTON D.C. 20515
USA

Dear Mr Hall and Mr McKinney

Thank you for your letter of 10 June 1983 on behalf of your Congressional colleagues concerning East Timor.

My trip to the United States in June was successful in reaffirming and strengthening the strong bonds of friendship between our two countries. As I said publicly in Washington, we are linked with the United States by a whole range of common interests, perceptions and associations in war and peace. My discussions in Washington underlined the fundamental importance the Australian Government attaches to its bilateral relationship with the United States.

Your letter raises the matter of East Timor and the policy of the Australian Government. As you mention humanitarian issues, I think it needs to be stressed that the over-riding concern of the Australian Government is for the welfare of the people of East Timor. To that end Australia has provided substantial aid and humanitarian relief over recent years. In June I announced a new Australian contribution of $A1.5 million to the International Red Cross relief program and UNICEF assistance program in East Timor. There are indications that concerted efforts are being made by the Indonesian authorities to improve the standard of living and infrastructure in East Timor and progress is evident.

During my visit to Indonesia, early in June, I had discussions with President Soeharto during which I put specific concerns to him, as did the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Hayden, during his earlier trip in April. Both My Hayden and I, on behalf of the Australian Government, expressed regret that an internationally supervised act of

.../2

self-determination had not taken place in East Timor. Australia was also anxious to see the expeditious completion of the program that has been going on for some time to reunite families split between East Timor and Australia. President Soeharto assured me that the programs would proceed as quickly as practicable, and indeed there have been further movements of East Timorese to Australia since my visit.

You may be aware that a bipartisan Australian parliamentary delegation visited Indonesia in July and spent some five days in East Timor. The Government believes that the Delegation's report, tabled in the Australian Parliament on 6 September, will provide an important input into Government and public consideration of the East Timor issue.

I welcome your recognition of the importance of strong and enduring relations with Indonesia. As I have repeated publicly several times, the primacy of our regional relations is fundamental to the conduct of this Government's foreign policy. The conduct of such relations in the period immediately ahead is likely to determine our role in this region for the rest of the century and beyond. Australia's strategic and economic interests are inextricably bound up with strong bilateral relationships with the ASEAN countries. Without such relations, we can have little influence in the region in which we live.

As I said in Jakarta during my visit, the Australian Government believes it is duty bound to give expression and practical effect to the consensus among the Australian people that we must work towards a sound and enduring relationship with Indonesia. In order to achieve this, I am of the view that we should not allow the events of the past to dictate the course of our deliberations. These must take account of both the present situation and, importantly, of the way we wish our relationship with Indonesia to develop.

Yours sincerely

R.J.L. Hawke